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PAROLE: MEETING THE CHALLENGE



The Strategic Plan of the
Massachusetts Parole Board

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PAROLE: MEETING THE CHALLENGE

The Strategic Plan of the Massachusetts Parole Board



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Massachusetts Parole Board**

April 1988



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It is also gratifying to me that the members and staff of the Massachusetts Parole Board responded to this opportunity with enthusiasm and a high degree of professionalism. I am pleased to acknowledge the efforts of many individuals from the Board, its staff, and from outside the agency who contributed to the development of this strategic plan.

A Strategic Planning Steering Group was formed to guide and inform the effort from its beginning, identifying critical issues and recommending difficult choices regarding priorities. Those who served along with myself on the group, and who gave generously of their time and talents include Lorraine Carli, former Public Information Officer; Edward Dolan, Director of the Planning and Research Unit; Jack Frazier, Director of Institutional Services; Robert Gittens, Board Member; Yvonne Gonzalez, General Counsel; Ruth Ann Jones, Executive Director; John Matthews, Director of Hearing Examiners; David McGrath, Executive Assistant; Donald J. Myers, Board Member; Kathy Skerry, Director of Human Resources and Staff Development; Scott Taberner, Fiscal Director; Joseph Williams, Director of Special Operations; and Timothy Zadai, Director of Field Services.

In addition, members of both Board and staff served on individual working groups, charged with refining strategic goals and developing implementation plans. The group addressing the issue of decision-making structure included Board Member Kevin Burke, Edward Dolan, Ruth Ann Jones, and David McGrath. Addressing the question of caseload management and supervision were Edward Dolan; Brian Faherty, Parole Supervisor; Robert Gittens, Scott Taberner, and Timothy Zadai. In the area of information support, group members included Edward Dolan; Jack Frazier; Sallyann Sweeney, Systems Analyst; and William Tucker, Deputy Chief of Institutional Services.

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John J. Curran, Jr.
Chairman
Massachusetts Parole Board
April 1988

PREFACE

The Massachusetts Parole Board--indeed the entire criminal justice system in the Commonwealth--is facing a crisis. The incarcerated population in Massachusetts has doubled over the last ten years--growing from just under 5,000 inmates in early 1978 to well over 11,000 inmates in late 1987. This reflects a national trend. Incarcerated populations also doubled during roughly the same time period for the United States as a whole. With the Massachusetts experience mirrored on the national level, one comparison provides dramatic perspective. The incarcerated population has previously doubled in this country--but it took from 1929 to 1974 to do so (Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice, 1986). What took 45 years in the mid-part of the century has taken only a decade during the 1970s and 80s.

The size and the pace of growth convey a sense of crisis.

The Commonwealth has responded to this crisis with an aggressive building program, aimed at providing adequate bed-space for convicted offenders. But the capacity of our correctional institutions continues to be tested. Community-based elements of the criminal justice system are being taxed as well. Because institutional bedspace is easy to count and crowded cells and hallways easy to visualize, the fact that the population of state and county correctional facilities now stands at 168 percent of capacity conveys an immediate sense of crisis. Less visible, but not less real, is a parallel increase in the number of individuals being channeled into probation and parole supervision which is testing the capacity of those systems as well. The number of hearings required of the Massachusetts Parole Board has increased by 239 percent from 1978 to 1987. A Board which was responsible for holding just over 2,500 hearings in 1978, is now responsible for over 9,000 hearings per year. The past ten years have seen more than a doubling of the number of parolees under supervision during the course of a year--from 4,171 in 1978 to 8,982 in 1987.

The causes of overpopulation and crowding are complex. Sentencing patterns, crime rates, demographics, legislation, and public attitudes contribute to the crisis. Changes affecting the very fabric of our society--changes in the family, the school, and the workplace--compound the problem. Only one thing is clear. The crisis is genuine. It is reflected in dramatic increases in numbers and in a population of offenders with increasingly complex and severe social, psychological, and physical problems. Beyond the boundaries of Massachusetts it is repeated in virtually every state in the union. Were the criminal justice system well-suited and well-equipped to deal with growth and change, the situation would be only difficult.

With the criminal justice system fragmented and uncoordinated in its responses to such problems, however, the situation is critical. Criminal justice agencies are currently ill-equipped, in terms of manpower, facilities, and management resources. They are struggling simply to keep pace with increasing workloads. Although some parts of the system have retooled their management information systems to include automated capabilities, most components of the system are still operating with manual information systems which simply cannot accommodate the demands for collecting, storing, analyzing, and updating information. The Massachusetts criminal laws are a product of a venerable tradition with roots dating back to the 1600s. They have not had the benefit, however, of a comprehensive review and restructuring in recent times. Though not atypical of state law, the result is a thicket of overlapping, arcane, and sometimes inconsistent sentencing structures.

While the policies and actions of the criminal justice system are sometimes uncoordinated or seem to work at cross purposes, public sentiment is sharply focused. The mood within the Commonwealth concerning crime is clear and demanding. The public is seeking protection from crime, especially violent and predatory crime. It has little patience with the needs of criminals when it views its own concerns for safety to be ill-served. Recent changes regarding incarceration for drunk driving and increases in the rate of reporting child abuse offenses are but two examples of a lessening in public tolerance for certain types of criminal behavior.

This is the dilemma of our criminal justice system. It is a system stretched to its limits while the citizens of Massachusetts demand more action to ensure the safety of their communities.

The following strategic plan presents the response of the Massachusetts Parole Board to this crisis. We are only one agency. Our success will depend not only upon our own determination but also upon the continuing growth in coordination, services planning, and support of our sister agencies within the criminal justice system. We welcome the comments and critique of other agencies. We hope this document will become but one element of a broader strategy for the Commonwealth's entire criminal justice system.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Against the backdrop of a growing and increasingly complex workload, attributable largely to dramatic increases in prison population, the Massachusetts Parole Board has recently engaged in a strategic planning effort. The purpose was to chart a course for the next five years, 1988 through 1992. This document is the agency's statement of purpose and plan of action which will guide its efforts over that time period.

The essence of the plan is a reaffirmation of the mission of parole within the criminal justice system and a focus upon three issues central to the accomplishment of that mission.

First, the Board and its entire agency have made a commitment to the development and implementation of explicit and effective release decision-making policy. The purpose of this policy is to ensure equitable and appropriate release decisions which balance the safety of the community with the needs of individual offenders.

As part of this strategic initiative, the Board is undertaking a major effort to develop a research-based tool to assist in assessing the risk presented by potential parolees. In addition, a streamlining of the process by which information is assembled in support of the Board's decisionmaking is being completed. This will have major benefits, not only for initial release decisionmaking, but also for revocation decisionmaking.

The second element of the Board's strategic plan aims to strengthen its ability to supervise parolees in the community through caseloads of more manageable size, and through a heavier emphasis upon preparation and training of field parole officers. In addition, it will focus upon the variation in needs and risks of individual parolees for which differential supervision strategies will be tailored. This initiative will focus the Board's supervision resources where they can be most effective in meeting the public's concern for safety and the offender's need for support services.

As part of this initiative on supervision strategies, the Board will be examining with care the potential role which technological advances in electronic monitoring of parolee behavior may play. It will continue to build on its experience with intensive supervision to ensure that this approach to community supervision is integrated effectively into the Board's array of programs. In addition, research efforts will be directed at developing a clear understanding of the resources required for various levels of supervision. This will yield a quantitative statement of the parole system's capacity and will aid greatly in the management of our resources.

The third element of the Board's strategic plan will improve its information capability. It will provide accurate, timely, and accessible information about inmates and parolees, about the agency's own workload and performance, and about the effectiveness of its release decisionmaking and supervision actions.

Preliminary steps have already been taken toward the completion of an automated management information system, and a clear strategy now exists for completing those steps. Implementation planning has begun. The systems approach has been selected. Vendor selection, systems design, procurement, installation and testing will continue through 1990, with completion of the installation process targeted for fiscal years 1990 and 1991.

The Massachusetts Parole Board has deliberately chosen to focus its attention on these strategic areas because they comprise the basic core functions of parole, and because the agency's ability to deal with these functions is being challenged by unprecedented growth in size and complexity of workload. The Massachusetts Parole Board and its entire agency are committed, not only to the course set out in this strategic plan, but also to the importance of continuing to think and plan strategically in the future.

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I. PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

No single part of the criminal justice system alone can address this crisis of population growth in the system and increased demand for services. It is particularly so for parole. As a function which stands at the end of the criminal justice system, its workload, the bounds of its authority, and its program options are largely determined by other parts of the system.

But a beginning must be made. Unless criminal justice agencies begin to think more strategically about their roles and directions, this system overload has little chance of being resolved. Against this backdrop, then, the Massachusetts Parole Board has taken the opportunity afforded it by the Legislature, the Governor, and the Executive Office of Human Services, to think and to plan strategically. It has taken this opportunity to assess its position within the criminal justice system, identify critical issues, articulate strategic goals, and chart a course to guide its efforts over the next five years. The document which follows outlines the Massachusetts Parole Board's strategic goals and its plans to work toward those goals through the early 1990s.

The strategic direction set out in this plan is not revolutionary. Indeed, the workload facing the Board demands that the strategy be one focused primarily on securing control over its core responsibilities, increasing capacity to respond to the workload, and maintaining its integrity as a key and respected member of the criminal justice community.

While the direction is not revolutionary; it is bold.

- It seeks greater openness, consistency, accountability, and effectiveness in release decisionmaking.
- It looks to greater focus and effectiveness of its field supervision resources.
- It speaks to integrating more directly its release decisionmaking and its supervision function, and to do so effectively with an increasing number of cases.
- It also focuses resources upon the information support required to accomplish those programmatic goals.

Maintaining internal direction and commitment is particularly difficult during periods of crisis. The temptation is to focus on the workload crisis of today, deferring attention to the future until tomorrow. This planning effort will be used, **first**, as a tool to focus the internal energies of the agency as it goes through a period of growth and challenge. **Second**, it sets a course for the future that will insure continuity of effort toward strategic goals. Implementation will require increased management capability and depth to meet increased demands on the agency's resources and to focus its efforts in an integrated set of policies to fulfill the mandate of the Board. The dual mandate, of protecting the safety of our communities while managing the successful reintegration of parolees, will be more effectively carried out as a result.

This strategic plan is a public document. It places the Massachusetts Parole Board on record with respect to its priority concerns in order to facilitate better cooperation among criminal justice agencies and a better understanding generally of the agency's mission and direction. Its central message is clear. Crime and related social problems are the shared concerns of the public safety agencies, social services and public health departments, and by the courts and corrections. The parole function is a vital element of the Commonwealth's overall response to the need for public safety and humane treatment of offenders. Parole is reasoned, proven, and well-focused. It is a resource to manage the transition of offenders from correctional institutions to the community. To ensure the public safety and meet the service needs of the offender, the transition must be carefully-timed and adequately-supervised. A well-run parole agency is essential to this task.

II. BACKGROUND

Development of This Plan

This plan is the product of growing concern among Parole Board members and staff regarding the agency's basic premises and how the operations of the Board have met and can better meet its legislative mandate. The Board sees daily the growth in volume and system complexity first hand. It is clear that "business as usual" will not be enough. A longer-range and broader view of problems and responses is needed. Therefore, supported by a special management reserve appropriation from the Legislature, the Board began strategic planning efforts in the spring of 1987. A specially constituted strategic planning steering group, assisted by outside contract resources, guided the effort which involved Board members and staff from each part of the agency.

A review of critical issues and problem areas was conducted, followed by a decision-making process to identify those issues of most import to the agency. Hard choices had to be made, and strategic goals chosen. Agency working groups then began the task of considering alternative courses of action, focusing on costs and benefits of each, along with the capabilities of the agency to achieve those goals.

The result is this strategic planning document. It is supported by carefully thought-out and detailed internal implementation plans for each strategic area. There is a clear sense within the agency of its direction, its tasks, and a delineation of responsibility for those tasks.

The management framework to carry out the strategy requires:

- continuity of effort, initially over the five-year span of time from 1988 through 1992;
- improved internal management systems and procedures, for better planning, evaluation, resource allocation, and communication;
- integration of actions and services among the Board itself, the institutional services staff, and field parole officers;

- building greater management capability and depth in the agency through staff development and staff additions.

The Massachusetts Parole Board is committed to move forward with this vision, to measure progress against these articulated goals, and to think strategically in the future about its direction and changing environment.

Context

The changes being experienced by the Massachusetts Parole Board over recent years reflect changes which have been taking place in the parole community nationally. Parole has been transformed from its original role as a board of lay citizens providing an oversight role on a limited number of release decisions to one of a highly professional decision-making and policy-making body responsible for the administration of a major public agency. The agency has a budget of \$8 million in fiscal year 1988 and will soon employ some 235 people. It is responsible for assembling and analyzing information in preparation for parole hearings, for making release and revocation decisions, and for supervision of parolees in the community.

In Massachusetts (and elsewhere) parole is in the public arena more now than ever before, as pressure from crowded institutions grows and public reaction to crime becomes more strident. Members of parole authorities are often called upon to participate in state-wide policy-making bodies, to oversee the design of automated information systems, and to utilize sophisticated and statistically-based decision tools. They are called upon to respond to the concerns of victims' groups and to improve relationships with the rest of the criminal justice system. No longer can board members restrict themselves to hearing and deciding on individual cases for release or revocation. This is a new era for parole.

One manifestation of this changing role has been the need for the Massachusetts Parole Board to expand services throughout the Commonwealth. The Board has, over the last decade, decentralized much of its community supervision services, and in 1986 added its eighth regional office in New Bedford. This move to a regional structure was deliberate. It was intended to place parole field services staff in communities accessible both to the clients they supervise and to the public they are charged to protect. This decentralization has created new and different management and organizational requirements from those experienced in a heavily centralized organization, concentrated in one location. In addition to its central office and eight regional offices, Parole Board staff are assigned to work inside some 22 prisons and houses of correction gathering infor-

mation and preparing inmates for parole hearings before the Board. Parole Board staff also are assigned to a small number of special programs.

Much of the change which has occurred in the agency in recent years is an adaptation to the enormous growth in the size and complexity of its workload and to the changing role which parole plays in the Massachusetts criminal justice system. Following are some of the trends bringing about change.

Expanded jurisdiction. Prior to 1960, the Parole Board handled only state cases. In 1960, the Board was given jurisdiction over county cases carrying sentences of more than one year, and all county cases sentenced by Superior Court. In 1980, jurisdiction was further expanded to include all county cases carrying sentences of 60 days or more. These added county cases of 60 days to one year account for 44% of all parole board hearings.

Increased population in state and county correctional facilities. The population in state and county institutions exceeded 11,000 by late 1987, representing an average annual growth rate of 9% over the past decade. In the last three years alone, the population has increased by more than one third.

Increased number of Parole Board hearings. As a result of these two trends, Parole Board hearings more than tripled from 1979 to 1987. The agency expects to hear more than 9000 cases this year. This places a heavy demand on the Board, whose size (seven members) has not changed since 1971, on the hearing officers who share the Board's hearing duties, and on the institutional parole staff, who prepare the cases. Even after the initial dramatic increase in the annual number of hearings resulting from the addition of county jurisdiction, the number of hearings has continued to grow significantly, averaging an annual growth rate of 8% since 1984.

Increased number of parolees under supervision. Growth in the Commonwealth's prison population also translates into a greater number of parolees under supervision. By the end of 1987, more than 4,000 parolees were being supervised by the agency's field parole officers, compared to 2,500 ten years earlier--a 5 percent average annual growth rate. During that period the number of field parole officers has fluctuated, but resources have not kept up with workload.

In 1987, each field parole officer handled an average caseload of 72, compared to an average caseload of 45 in 1976. (This was, however, an improvement from the high of 82 in 1984.) Furthermore, figures on average caseloads do not fully convey a sense of the volume of cases for which a field parole officer takes responsibility in a given year. The total number on parole has grown rapidly, at 9 percent per year, and parole officers today deal with many more cases annually than ever before in the Board's history.

Numbers do not tell the full story of increased demands on agency resources. The cases facing the Board for decisions on release and for supervision in the community are more complex and the problems more severe than was true in a simpler time. Several trends contribute to this change in qualitative terms:

Deinstitutionalization. In recent years, an increasing proportion of individuals with mental health service needs are treated in the community rather than being hospitalized in mental health institutions. This is a result of deliberate efforts at "deinstitutionalization" spurred by increasingly successful outpatient drug therapy for mental health problems, a realization that institutions are not optimal treatment settings for many clients, and a concern for the increasing costs of inpatient care. With a higher proportion of mental health clients in the community, the likelihood of these individuals appearing in the criminal justice system has increased. As a consequence, the Massachusetts Parole Board is faced with a population of potential and actual parolees who present increasingly severe, complex, and extensive mental health service needs.

Changing community attitudes. Nationwide, attitudes about sex crimes, especially those against children, and those within the family, are changing. There is less hesitation to discuss and acknowledge that such behavior exists and an accompanying willingness to report this behavior to the authorities. As a result, there are increased numbers of offenders in prison for dangerous sex offenses against both children and adults. These types of offenders present particularly difficult decisions as public safety needs are balanced with the needs for effective treatment of such offenders.

Massachusetts' historical approach to incarceration. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts historically has used incarceration as a criminal sanction less frequently than do most other states. Massachusetts' incarceration rate in 1986 (defined and reported by the Bureau of Justice Statistics as the number of prisoners sentenced to more than 1 year per 100,000 resident population) stood at 97, less than half the national average for state incarceration. Only five states in the country have lower rates of incarceration, with some states' rates ranging

as high as 324. The result is a population in the Commonwealth's institutions that has a higher percentage of serious and violent offenders than many other states. Such offenders, by definition, present difficult release and supervision issues.

Drug and alcohol use. Mirroring a change in drug and alcohol use behavior in the society at large, cases coming before the Parole Board show increasing frequency of drug and alcohol involvement. Treatment and public safety issues are made more complex and difficult by the presence of these behaviors.

Each of these changes in social policy, social problems, or behavior creates difficulties for the Parole Board as it faces decisions about if and when to release a particular offender, and with what conditions of behavior (such as abstinence from alcohol) to impose. Further, these problems place greater demands on the human service resources in our communities, as they must provide services to aid in solving these problems. Finally, the sophistication and skills of the parole officers in supervising those on parole must be greater, with more and different types of possible intervention required to respond to problems.

Parallel Initiatives of the Massachusetts Parole Board

This strategic plan is a key part of the agency's efforts to improve its operations in the face of change and significant increases in demand for services. Concurrently, the Parole Board is improving its support systems in the field offices (i.e., terminals accessing information from other law enforcement agencies, word processing capabilities, and a field parole case tracking system) and examining ways to improve its case processing at the institutions. It is also exploring supervision alternatives through trial implementation of an Intensive Parole Supervision program; other service responses to parolees with special needs, such as the MassCAPP Program for the developmentally disabled; optimum use of residential programs; and new technology-supported means of specialized supervision.

The Board has also made specific efforts to build vehicles for cooperation with other public agencies in order to create more access to services and to maximize existing resources in the Commonwealth. For example, the Board has contributed to the Department of Public Safety's computer network (LEAPS/CJIS), has undertaken a cooperative effort with the Department of Mental Health's Forensic Mental Health Unit, and is currently involved with the Department of Public Health in a joint assessment/placement project for substance abusers in three areas of the Commonwealth. Although more of this type of coordination and cooperation is needed, a beginning has been made.

III. MISSION OF THE MASSACHUSETTS PAROLE BOARD

The Massachusetts Parole Board is an integral part of the Commonwealth's criminal justice system and shares its general goals of public safety and crime prevention. The Board's specific mission in the system is to protect the public while seeking to reintegrate suitable offenders into the community. In carrying out this mission, the Board has responsibility for three primary functions:

- determining the suitability of an inmate for a grant of parole;
- supervising those offenders who receive such a grant in the community, under provisions and practices that best protect the safety of the public and reintegrate the offender into the community; and
- determining when revocation of parole is appropriate for reasons of public safety or the welfare of the offender.

The Board also acts as the Advisory Board to the Governor in matters of executive clemency.

To fulfill its mission and perform its functions well is a difficult and complex charge. This charge might best be understood within the context of the numerous decisions confronting the Board, both with respect to parole release and with respect to parole supervision and revocation. All of these decisions are important because they involve the safety of the public as well as questions of personal liberty. They are of varying levels of difficulty.

A few decisions are relatively easy. These are the decisions which fall at the extremes--where all factors point either to release and minimal supervision or to lengthy incarceration and strict supervision. An example at one extreme is the person whose crime is non-violent, whose record of other offenses is not lengthy, whose age, family situation, education and employment history point to stability, whose behavior in prison has been exemplary, whose understanding of his wrongdoing is serious and genuine, and whose time served has satisfied the law and the court's expectations for justice will not pose much problem in deciding for release or in planning for supervision.

Unfortunately, such individuals do not dominate our prison population nor do such relatively easy decisions dominate the caseload of the Massachusetts Parole Board.

Most decisions are tougher. The person whose crime was violent, fatal, cruel, and taken against a particularly helpless victim, will someday be eligible for parole. If he has served 20 years, behaved in prison beyond reproach, expressed extreme remorse, successfully completed many furloughs in the community, been employed, and lived in a community-based facility, perhaps release would not conflict with public safety and reintegration may be uneventful. But the decision to release or not to release is likely to cause genuine concern. Planning for supervision is more complex, and such a case is generally seen as riskier than the first example.

Still other decisions are difficult because they are made under less than ideal pressures of time. The sentencing laws and correctional policies allow and grant "good time" reductions in the sentenced time to be served based on good behavior in the institution. Earliest parole eligibility may precede by only several months to a year the date upon which an offender must be discharged as a result of earning such deductions. The decision to release may be made so as to require a period of time under parole supervision, rather than to take the risk of unconditional release to the community with no managed transition. In these instances the decision may be seen as clearly in the public interest, but only the better of two less than desirable alternatives.

Another factor which makes the Massachusetts Parole Board's mission so difficult is the degree to which it must depend upon organizations outside itself for information and cooperation. Once an inmate is admitted to a correctional facility, institutional parole staff begin preparations for parole consideration. The parole eligibility date is calculated and information regarding the inmate and the offense are assembled. Information is gathered from the court, from probation, sometimes from law enforcement and prosecutorial agencies, from the 16 separate county correctional facilities, and from the Department of Correction. Indeed, the Board has few resources to do independent verification of information, so it relies heavily upon information provided from these other agencies in widely varied, non-standard forms.

Reliance on other agencies' resources is equally apparent in the supervision function. Field parole officers rely upon the information of other agencies as the basis for assessing risk and service needs in developing a supervision plan for an offender. The Board utilizes specific program resources in the field through referral of parolees to other service providers for alcohol and drug counseling, mental health services, em-

ployment assistance, and training. Parolees are sometimes under supervision of probation as well, based on another or the same offense or sentence. In all such cases, there is a clear need for cooperative efforts between parole and its sister agencies in the public sector--in planning, service delivery, and sharing or deciding primary responsibility for clients.

The interdependence of parole with the rest of the system is further apparent in that its workload is largely determined by the actions of persons outside the parole agency. The number of individuals reaching parole eligibility in any given year, and the number of individuals requiring hearings and supervision, are a function of the actions of the rest of the system.

This strategic plan responds directly to the difficult decisions which the Board faces in parole release and supervision and will allow the Massachusetts Parole Board to do more than react to its environment. It is designed to build a capability to anticipate workload demands and to meet those changing demands in a focused and well-integrated manner.

IV. PAROLE'S ROLE IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Current Issues

Public perceptions of parole and what it does in the criminal justice system are too frequently inaccurate. Parole is often perceived as backdoor leniency, or as somehow subverting the intentions of the sentencing court. It is sometimes accused of disregard for the sensibilities of the victim and the community. It may even be characterized simply as time off for good behavior. But it is none of these. The vast majority of incarcerated inmates will ultimately return with or without a parole release to the community, many within months of their earlier parole eligibility. Parole is a legally-constituted part of the sentencing structure designed to manage the transition from incarceration to the streets in a way that enhances public safety and works to reintegrate the offender into the community.

Several facts about parole are especially pertinent. **First**, the point at which inmates are eligible to be considered for parole release is determined in the first instance by the sentence imposed, not by the pure discretion of the Parole Board. The eligibility calculations can, admittedly, be confusing because of the complex nature of criminal sentencing structure, but all eligibilities are based either on statute or on Board policy authorized by statute.

Furthermore, a sentence of a specific number of years is imposed by the court with the knowledge that some reduction for good behavior is allowable by law. This reduction for good behavior (known as "good time") is not an action of the Parole Board, but of the Department of Correction and is intended, primarily, to provide an incentive for civil institutional behavior and thereby to assist in maintaining order in those institutions.

Second, sentence length assumes that for most cases some period of time (usually up to one-third or up to two-thirds of the sentence) will be served "outside the walls" under some type of community supervision. This allows the inmate to adjust to life in the community, and, just as importantly, allows the system to maintain control and special legal authority over the parolee during a period of transition.

Such supervision is an investment well worth the modest cost, with returns in protection of the public safety and in the return of contributing members to the community. Evidence of success in any aspect of the criminal justice system

should be examined carefully; but it is true that most persons released on parole do not come back into the system, not during the period of their parole nor thereafter. It is also true that those who do re-enter the institution while on parole frequently do so as the direct result of parole officer monitoring and action--in the interest of protecting community safety.

Third, should the parolee begin engaging in behavior which increases risk to the community, parole brings with it flexible and easily-mobilized methods to stabilize the parolee through increased services and/or supervision and, failing this, to bring a return to secure custody. Inmates who are released from prison without benefit of parole supervision have "no strings," and, therefore, no similar societal controls or help and whatever behavioral problems are present will remain unaddressed.

Fourth, the Massachusetts Parole Board has specific authority to receive information from, and respond to the need and concerns of victims of crime. Victims who wish to provide information are made aware of upcoming parole hearings and their input is welcome. This provides an immediate and current channel for victims of crime to voice their concerns about public safety and the reasonableness of punishment. It allows the parole decision-making process to take place with a sense of the impact of the crime upon the victim. While the courts also are open to input from victims, they can receive such input only at the time of trial and sentencing. The parole process offers an opportunity for input at the time when imminent release from prison is under consideration. Thus, the victim is also assured of knowing the complete outcome of the case, bringing, for some, a closure to that event. Field services staff can respond to victims with extra measures of safety for victims.

Fifth, and perhaps most important, the period immediately following release is widely considered to be a perilous time for the inmate and the community. All the structure inherent in a correctional setting immediately disappears from the life of the inmate upon parole. He or she faces the unstructured situation of community life. The parolee may be particularly vulnerable to fall back into the circumstances which originally led to his incarceration--drug and alcohol use, lack of productive employment, unstable living arrangements, association with known criminals. The timing and conditions of release imposed by the Parole Board can be tailored specifically to address these issues. Supervision by a field parole officer helps to provide some structure in the parolee's life, and eases the transition. Inmates released without any supervision or controls represent an inherently greater risk to the community.

Historical Context

Rapid growth in prison and jail inmate populations, beyond the housing capacity of these institutions, is the most visible sign of turmoil in the criminal justice system in recent years. But for parole, the last twenty years have seen the emergence of several other trends, each potentially damaging to the continued existence of parole. In the early 1970's, researchers proclaimed the death sentence of the rehabilitative ideal: "rehabilitation doesn't work and ought to be abandoned as a correctional goal." At the same time, criminal justice reform advocates began pressing for an end to indeterminate sentencing, finding it the source of inordinate sentence disparity, and a major cause of inmate frustration. Because of its historic roots in the development of the twin ideals of rehabilitation and the indeterminate sentence, parole was caught up in the debate which surrounded them.

Although unrelated at their outset, the criticisms of both rehabilitation and indeterminate sentencing were seized upon in the late 1970's and 1980's by those seeking a more purely punitive response to law breakers. Much of the continuing movement across the country toward mandatory sentences and determinate sentencing structures is driven by concerns for increasing the severity and certainty of punishment, not by concern for equity and accountability in sentencing among criminals. The focus is now upon increased certainty and harshness in sentencing, and reflects the misperception that parole represents leniency on the part of the system.

The Strengths of Parole

The pressure for more determinate sentencing, with its concomitant pressure for a reduction or elimination of the parole function, ignores the critical function that parole has come to play in the protection of the community and in the management of the overall correctional system. It ignores the strengths which parole brings to the criminal justice system.

First, parole controls the release of most offenders from institutions into the community. The Parole Board has the authority to deny release or to impose conditions on release, thus **tailoring the release decision to the particular situation of each offender.**

Second, the possibility of parole offers corrections officials an **incentive with which to influence the behavior of offenders within the institutions.** It can be one change agent in an inmate's life.

Third, through its supervision function, the parole board provides an **extra degree of surveillance and control of the offender once in the community**. Parole begins with the premise that the re-entry period is critical. Research bears this out. The risk of recidivism is reduced the longer offenders are out of prison. Prisons and county houses of correction, whose main thrust is incapacitation, do not have jurisdiction which extends beyond release from behind their own walls. Parole has such jurisdiction.

Fourth, in supervising offenders in the community, parole officers **broker services and treatment**. They have the authority to require participation by parolees which often facilitates their reintegration back into the world outside the walls.

Fifth, determinate sentencing under which plea bargaining becomes charge bargaining, does not eliminate all of the ways in which offenders are treated differently before sentencing. Parole offers a **final opportunity to insure that similarly situated offenders receive similar treatment from the justice system**.

Finally, the continuing upheaval in the criminal justice system produces on-going changes in the inmate population. The number of inmates, the proportion of violent to non-violent and long-term to short-term offenders, and the particular profile of the inmate population are all in flux. **Parole remains one of the most important tools the system has to respond flexibly to changes in prison population.**

V. STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

We believe the continued value of the parole function is clear. Yet its continued effectiveness is threatened by inadequate resources--funds, staffing, information, consistent policy based on experience, and continuity of organizational and management structure. This Massachusetts Parole Board strategic plan is intended to document where the agency is headed, to identify the critical actions that must be taken, and to indicate the bases upon which the agency should be judged. It identifies needed resources and lays out efforts to secure those resources. The agency will be accountable to the directions described here, and its stewardship in the implementation of these efforts can be evaluated over future years.

As part of the strategic planning process, a wide range of issues that affect the parole function was examined. These covered internal management systems, external factors which help influence what the agency must do, resource availability, the relative effectiveness of existing practices, changes in parole systems around the country, supervising the parolees, and the ways in which these issues interact. Seven areas were identified as having strategic importance. They are outlined below.

Decision-making structure. This area includes:

- the need for explicit decision policy;
- the need to improve the quality of information and to improve the analysis of information upon which decisions are based;
- the need to develop the capability to monitor parolee performance to improve future decisions;
- the need to improve accountability for decisions; and
- the need to assure equity in the way in which persons are considered for parole.

Caseload management and supervision strategies. This area includes:

- the need to reduce the number of cases supervised by each parole officer;
- the need to provide more intensive supervision;
- the need to define differential parole supervision practices based on client need and risk;
- the need to provide sound preparation of new parole officers; and
- the need to monitor system performance in order to evaluate parole officers and the effectiveness of differential parole practices.

Access to community services. This area includes:

- the need to identify and update service needs for the parole population;
- the need to improve methods of assessing service needs, to improve procedures for referring parolees to services, and to develop methods for identifying effective services;
- the need to define appropriate liaison between parole and service providers;
- the need to identify resource and program gaps.

Information support. This area includes the requirements for:

- a definition of information needs, specification of data acquisition responsibility, and clarification of quality control responsibility;

- a definition of roles and standards for efficient case processing in the parole hearing preparation stage;
- the automation of case processing including client and client status information;
- the ability to access and communicate such information from anywhere in the state; and
- the integration of the institutional and field services data systems.

Policies and procedures. This area includes:

- the need to update and publish current policies and procedures manuals;
- the need to design and install means for timely modification of such manuals;
- the need to focus initial attention on policies and procedures for release decisions, case supervision, and information support; and
- the need for a revision of agency training based on such policies and procedures manuals.

Criminal justice system-wide implications. This area identifies:

- the need to communicate to other agencies in the system the impact of their actions on parole, e.g., on information access and provision, availability of services, consistent decision criteria;
- the need to communicate to other agencies in the system the Parole Board's plan of action so that other agencies can anticipate and plan sensibly for those actions; and
- the need to encourage and participate in interagency analysis of problems

and policies affecting both parole and the other stages of the criminal justice process.

Coordination with Department of Correction and county houses of correction. This area underlines the importance of:

- identifying specific joint planning forums with the Department of Correction/houses of correction;
- coordinating information development, acquisition, and access; and
- sharing analysis and planning for estimating future prison and parole populations.

From the list three areas were selected for emphasis in the strategic plan--**decision-making structure, caseload management and supervision, and information support.**

These were chosen because they deal directly with the basic functions of parole--release decisionmaking and supervision, and because measuring the effectiveness and efficiency of the way in which these functions are carried out requires reliable, timely, and usable information.

Other issues which arose in the process of strategic planning, but which were not designated as strategic areas, will clearly be affected by improvements in release decision-making, caseload management, and information support. For instance, the development of release decision-making policy is a major step in the completion of new policies and procedures. Likewise, strides in the caseload management area will surely touch upon questions of access to community service. And the development of new information management capabilities will require and encourage interagency cooperation.

Everything the agency does is affected by actions of each of the other criminal justice agencies. Because parole lies at the end of the criminal justice system, the Massachusetts Parole Board must depend on critical information and cooperation from others. The need for interagency planning and analysis is very clear from the parole perspective. It is our intent to seek such cooperation and to participate actively.

As the strategic planning process continues, as initial goals are met, the Board will surely look to this broader list of issues as the focus of future efforts. In 1988, however, the focus is clear. The sections which follow outline specific plans for achieving these three selected strategic goals.

VI. STRATEGIC PLAN FOR 1988-1992

The basic strategy of the Massachusetts Parole Board for the next five years is to improve the competence and thoroughness with which the basic parole functions of release decision-making and parolee supervision are done. We seek to define and manage improvements in these processes that are measurable, gain widespread agency and public support, lead to observable enhancements in the effectiveness of parole, and respond clearly to both the goals of public safety and reintegration of the offender into society.

This strategy deliberately avoids the temptation to focus on innovation or technology or major redirection. It focuses rather on performing the Board's core functions well. The challenge for parole in Massachusetts, and in most other jurisdictions, is not to find the "silver bullet" solution that will instantaneously dissolve all problems and troublesome ambiguities in the system. Rather it is for clear policy, sound procedure, strong management, and leadership that stresses quality and competence in the activities of the parole agency.

We believe significant progress has been made over the last several years toward these ends:

- caseload reduction has begun with significant gains over the last two years;
- definition has begun of more explicit decision policies to provide greater consistency in release decisions, and to allow the Board to focus on the toughest decisions;
- organizational changes have been made to assign and clarify responsibility, and well qualified managers have been named to key positions;
- systematic training for new parole officers has been instituted;
- automation of information processing, storage, and analysis has been initiated;

- interagency cooperation with other parts of the system has improved; and
- active public information and education efforts have been undertaken to enhance communication between the agency and the public.

Much more remains to be done, and the resource requirements are likely to continue to grow for the next several years. This strategy describes the uses to which the agency will put these resources.

A. Decision-making Structures

Decisionmaking is one of the two major responsibilities of the Massachusetts Parole Board, the second being supervision of parolees in the community. Decisions must be made regarding when an offender may be released during his or her period of parole eligibility, under what conditions, and under what circumstances parole should be revoked and a parolee returned to prison. It is a difficult responsibility, one which must meet several criteria:

- effectiveness, in order to release an offender to the community at a time and under conditions that protect the public and enhance the prospect of a parolee's successful return as a productive citizen;
- equity, so that release decision-making is even-handed and perceived by both the public and the offender to work fairly and consistently;
- flexibility, so that the unique aspects of individual cases can be dealt with, and specific decisions can be tailored to particular conditions; and
- accountability, with a pattern of decisions that are open to examination by the public for judgment as to whether the goals of community safety and offender reintegration are well met.

It is the position of the Massachusetts Parole Board that these criteria can best be met and the goals inherent in the decision-making process can best be achieved through the judicious development and use of decision-making policy. While each release decision is individual, and must be based on the facts and circumstances of that specific situation, the Board makes each decision based on information which is presented and analyzed according to standard categories, and guided by the structure of decision policy.

Release decisions cannot best be made solely on the judgment of individual board members operating with implicit and individually-held norms for decisionmaking. At the same time, release decisions cannot blindly follow pre-determined rules. Responsible decisionmaking must balance the need for

standards and equity with the need for individual consideration and flexibility. Hence, the Board's decision-making policy will have as a basic tenet, that the Board may depart from policy in individual cases, and that the reasons for such departure will be stated.

Similar offenders treated equitably is but a beginning point for the decision to grant parole. Informed judgment, tempered by policy and based on experience with the results of release decisions is the core value of an independent parole release authority. We believe such decision-making structure, balancing policy and individual case decisions, is vital to a fair criminal justice system.

Objectives

We have three specific objectives with respect to decision-making structure:

- To put in place a revised decision-making structure with respect to release decisions and revocation decisions by the end of 1988.

Decision-making structure is defined as explicit, published policy based upon the collective goals of the Board for release decisionmaking and which is sufficiently operational to guide individual decisions.

- To ensure that those policies reflect the goals of the Massachusetts Parole Board, are developed and adopted by the members of the Board, and are understood and shaped by agency staff.
- To ensure that the policy contributes to consistency and quality in decisionmaking, especially with respect to risk management.

Specific Strategies

Operational Requirements. The policy must be sufficiently operational so as to guide actual individual decisionmaking. The primary indicator of having achieved this goal will be that the tools used to implement the policy can be used reliably by all Board members and staff, i.e.,

the policy will be explicit and operational such that two or more individuals can review the same case and, following the policy and using the decision tools, arrive at a similar policy-recommended decision. The actual decision taken, of course, will reflect the judgment of the Board.

The policy must be supported by data collection instruments and an operations manual for staff (including hearing examiners and institutional parole officers). Routine orientation of hearing examiners and institutional parole officers will include training in information collection to support the policy and in the preparation of a "parole summary" which provides necessary information to Board members upon which to base their release decision.

Data collection instruments, handbooks, and an orientation will also be prepared and utilized by field parole officers with respect to revocation decisionmaking.

A monitoring system will be developed so that the Board can track how well it follows such policy, how often it departs, and what adjustments are needed. A mechanism for periodic review and revision of the policy has been established (specifying timing of review, personnel responsible, and format of review results) to ensure that the Board will be able to assess and continue to improve its decision-making practice. A handbook to explain the policy to the inmate population as well as to the public is being developed. A periodic review will include an updating of the handbook.

The Board has been working on the topic of release decision-making policy for some time. Further planning for decision-making policy will be in translating the existing policy statement into operational procedures for the Board, designing support systems and procedures for structuring and presenting information, and in implementation actions.

Alternatives. Clearly, there are many ways that a paroling agency could go about designing and implementing decision-making policy. The Massachusetts Parole Board has already made some of those significant choices. Others remain to be addressed as the Board proceeds with the implementation of various aspects of its policy. Following are the major elements which will be included in our decision-making policy.

- Goals. In its work over the last year, the Board has identified its primary decision-making goals and those are to be found in its mission statement. In sum, this statement indicates that the two

major goals of the Board in making release decisions are to enhance the safety of the public and to successfully reintegrate the offender. In most instances, the Board assumes that the question of punishment has been fully addressed by the sentencing court in its imposition of sentence with accompanying parole eligibility.

- Information. Information for the decision will be in a standard format, prepared prior to the hearing by the Board's staff and will include, at a minimum: reliable and complete information regarding the offense, sentence, and parole eligibility; an assessment of the degree of harm involved in this and previous crimes of the offender (stakes assessment); an assessment of the risk the individual would pose if released; an assessment of supervision strategies to manage risk; and an assessment of the needs of the offender that must be addressed in order to succeed as a member of the community.
- Release standards. Once the elements of decisionmaking are identified, they must be integrated into some structure which expresses the policy of the Board. (E.g., a decision guide or rule is indicated for each specific risk assessment and understanding of past and potential harm.) The Board is still in the process of developing its standards, and the specific structure to be implemented is yet to be selected. It will be finalized after the Board has had experience with the decision tools which are to be developed. At present, the thinking of the Board suggests some moderate degree of structure in the development of policy probably more explicit than a narrative listing of criteria, but probably less explicit than a decision matrix.

- Decision-making tools. Such tools can guide what information is used, how it is arrayed, how it is assessed, and how that relates to the policy of the Board. At present, efforts are underway to develop an empirically-based risk prediction tool. Because risk assessment often leaves unanswered the question "risk of what?," (e.g., violence, rearrest, reincarceration, etc.) the Board has also set itself the task of developing some sensible and consistent way of assessing the "stakes" or harm involved in an offender's past criminal conduct and in potential future criminality.
- Link with supervision. The purpose of setting required conditions for release is to enhance reintegration or to minimize risk. Release decision-making policy can be written specifically to anticipate, encourage, or direct supervision practices. The Board has made the choice that its decision-making policy will relate directly to supervision practices, linking conditions of release and supervision strategies to the release decision.
- Case preparation. Procedures and formats are in development to allow information to be prepared prior to the hearing in such a way that information pertinent to each element of the decision policy is available.
- Operations. With the development of decision-making policy, it is now possible to have heavier staff involvement at the institutional parole officer (IPO) level, in preparing information in policy-relevant formats. It also raises the possibility that the IPO's will be cast in the role of preparing

decision recommendations for the board based upon its decision-making policy. This would place less importance on information-assembly tasks on the part of IPO's, and would emphasize their role in synthesis and evaluation of information as a support to the decisionmaking of the Board.

- Monitoring. Part of the strategic importance of decision policy is that such policy will aid in making decisions "better." In order to achieve that goal, it will be necessary to systematically track decision-making practices as well as the performance of individuals on parole. Each decision of the Board will be recorded in a manner to allow tracking to identify both the policy recommendation and the Board action. This will allow decisions to be tracked in terms of how frequently the Board follows policy and how frequently it departs, as well as the rationale for, and outcome of, those decisions. This information forms the basis for analyzing data in the aggregate and supports learning from agency experience. This will allow the Board to determine whether decision-making policy is realistic or whether it is in need of revision.

There is much left to be done in terms of completing decision-making policy. Because this is a complex and evolving task, the Board's strategy is to take an incremental approach, revising and building elements of policy as it proceeds.

Certain elements of decision policy (e.g., risk assessment, stakes assessment, development of a monitoring capability) have already been identified by the Board as essential elements. Work will proceed immediately on the development of those elements or tools. Tools will be used on a pilot basis by institutional parole staff as they prepare case files for hearings. The Board members will not initially be using them in a policy context, but will be able to see how the tools organize, standardize, and synthesize information

for them. In the risk assessment area, an interim tool will be produced by agency research staff to be used by institutional parole staff in preparing cases. This will allow the Board and staff to become accustomed to receiving and using such an instrument. Once the empirical research has been completed for a technically-verified assessment tool, it will then be substituted for the "interim instrument."

Determination of a specific final policy structure will be made after the work on developing and "getting used to" the assessment tools has been completed. This will assure that the Board has tested the proposed structure through practical experience as it develops a fit to the policy framework within which to use these tools.

Resource Requirements

Resource requirements for further developing policy fall into three areas:

- the time and attention required of Board members to engage policy questions and come to consensus;
- staff effort required to select an interim risk instrument, develop a stakes assessment instrument and a final risk instrument, and to support the policy-making activities of the Board; and
- funds for the outside technical and research assistance needed to complete the development of a risk assessment instrument. (Outside funding will be sought for this work, estimated at \$50,000 for one year.)

Coordination and Integration Requirements

Efforts in the further development and implementation of decision-making policy will require coordination with the two other major strategic areas: caseload management and information support.

With respect to caseload management, three issues must be addressed. First, as differential strategies for supervision are developed, Board members must be aware of those strategies as tools to manage the risk of potential parolees upon release. Second, procedures for Board members' communicating their risk and needs assessments, as well as their

directions concerning special conditions, must be developed so that field parole officers and their supervisors can routinely receive input from Board members regarding supervision questions. The Board members must also receive feedback on the impact and effectiveness of various conditions of release and supervision strategies. Third, the role of the institutional Parole Officer in assessing needs and risk in preparation for a hearing must be clearly defined, tools for such assessments developed and provided, and training in how to use them made available to institutional parole staff.

With respect to information support, it is essential that the decision-making policy working group and staff involved in redesigning the institutional case processing system work together closely. That system should be redesigned directly to support decision-making policy. Assessment tools for risk and stakes, standard formats for presentation of offender and offense information, along with sentencing data, must be part of the redesigned system.

The other major factor in the implementation of decision policy is the critical role played by momentum and organizational support. This is a difficult task. In order to stay on track several techniques will be used. The effort will be broken into manageable tasks with specific time-lines and staffing assignments. The development work will purposely involve a significant number of staff and board members in order to build understanding and support within the organization. Emphasis will be placed upon the learning which accompanies such an effort. It will be a process of exploration. Inevitably, some approaches will be tried and discarded. Genuine progress will be made only with continuing and consistent effort.

B. Caseload Management and Supervision

The second major element of this strategic plan addresses supervision of offenders released on parole, a function designed both to protect the public safety and to aid offenders in re-entering the community as law abiding and productive citizens. There is wide consensus both in the criminal justice system and among the public that such a period of supervision after release from the correctional institution is preferred to release without any supervision. It is a function that appeals to common sense as well as to a perception of justice.

The parole officer monitors the parolee's behavior--to be sure that employment is maintained, that the home and living situation is supportive and without violence, that adherence is observed to the conditions of parole such as to abstinence from drug and alcohol abuse, and that the parolee's actions do not result in a resumption of criminal behavior and arrest. At the same time, the parole officer provides guidance and referral for problem situations, such as the need for substance abuse counseling, for mental health services, for skills training or additional education, and acts as a tangible, present expression of society's concern for the parolee's welfare. With growing caseloads it becomes ever more important to focus supervision resources effectively. It is this management of the offender's transition back to the community that is the core of caseload management.

Objectives

We have four specific objectives with respect to field caseload management. Each can be defined separately, but the objectives are interactive and mutually interdependent. They are:

- To increase the administrative and direct parolee supervision capacity of the Field Services Unit;
- To better prepare and train field parole officers;
- To develop and implement an improved system of differential supervision which maximizes the effectiveness of agency resources through the use of new supervision strategies and technologies; and

- To develop and put into place a system of performance monitoring for all aspects of the Field Services Unit's operations.

Each of these objectives builds on work which has already begun and practices which have proven effective in the past. Each objective is predicated on a clear set of premises which states the basis of the actions proposed. These premises provide the guidance against which alternative actions can be evaluated. Taken together, the actions to reach each of these objectives will lead to rational and goal-directed parole supervision. It will then be possible to evaluate the relative effectiveness of such supervision practices in enhancing the public safety and successfully reintegrating the offender into society.

The rationale and basic premises for each objective are summarized below.

Specific Strategies

Increased Capacity of the Field Services Unit. The agency must first address the critical constraint of capacity if it is to increase the effectiveness of the Field Services Unit over the next several years. This includes both the capacity of the existing corps of Field Parole Officers to continue to safely and effectively supervise an ever expanding caseload and the administrative capacity within the unit to manage these resources to accomplish an increasingly difficult and complex mission.

The agency intends to address this latter issue by seeking to increase the administrative resources both at the central office as well as at the regional office level. At the central office level, these resources will be a first step in reducing a span of control that requires the Chief of Field Services and a single deputy chief to manage a staff of 90 and a client base of some 4,000 offenders located in 8 regional offices and 3 specialized programs in 11 locations statewide.

At the regional office level, it means augmenting the supervisory capacity of a regional supervisor responsible for a staff of 9 to 11 individuals and an average daily client base of some 500 offenders.

In terms of the agency's "on street" capacity, present caseloads clearly stretch the ability of the individual parole officer to focus enough time and attention on each case to assure effective supervision and support in every case. With an average caseload between 68 and 72, parole officers are hard pressed to carry out their supervision tasks, complete their

reporting, and spend time on professional development. As a result supervision resources are taxed to the limit and there is little flex left in the system to target resources optimally, to evaluate, to make improvements, and to manage the system as efficiently as possible.

In order to give our Field Services staff the capacity to employ innovative methods to manage its caseload and to carry out systems improvements generally, then, a key step is caseload reduction. Cutting individual caseloads to the 45 to 50 parolee range will vastly improve the ability of field services to provide sound supervision and to systematically assess and improve that supervision. In proposing to do this gradually, the agency will create the opportunity to determine caseload supervision standards based on a thorough and researched understanding of the time required for supervising different types of cases.

In order to accomplish this objective of added capacity, a two-year, phased approach is planned:

- First, in the FY 1988 budget, the agency received one deputy chief, one regional supervisor, two assistant supervisors and five field parole officer positions. The deputy chief and assistant supervisor positions will be used to augment the management resources available to the Field Services Unit. The goal is to provide added operational control and improved quality control of existing offices and programs so as to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of field supervision today, and to create the capacity to design and carry out improvements to this fundamental segment of agency operations in the future.
- Second, the supervisor and parole officer positions will be used to establish the Region 9 parole office in the Framingham, Massachusetts area. This will provide an immediate solution to the problem of excessively high caseloads (90 plus parolees per parole officer) in the central Massachusetts region. In addition, this will mark the first step towards generally smaller average caseloads statewide.

- A third step, planned for FY 1989, will be a budget request for a third deputy chief, one regional supervisor, six assistant regional supervisors, and nineteen field parole officer positions. If granted, this request will allow the agency to continue on track to: add a tenth region and thereby achieve a second reduction of caseload size; add supervisory staff at the regional field offices to allow for closer case monitoring and performance management; and, achieve a final reduction of the span of control required of central field administrative staff.
- The final step is planned for FY 1990 with a request for six to seven additional parole officer positions. This will complete the overall reduction of caseloads to the 45 to 55 parolee range.

Smaller caseloads, reduction in span of control, and additional regional supervisory resources will provide the management infrastructure and resources necessary for achievement of goals in the area of differential supervision, training, and performance monitoring outlined below.

Preparation and Training of Field Parole Officers. Selecting the right people and training them well is always important. Given the public safety responsibilities of the Parole Board, such preparation is crucial. With the added factor of an influx of new parole officers, training to communicate agency policy and practice becomes even more vital.

A Field Services Training committee, headed by the Chief of Field Services and composed of experienced field officers, legal and training personnel, is in place to review content, presentation, and applicability of new field parole officer and in-service training curricula. As part of this review, the agency will establish a training evaluation process to follow each training session that will gain feedback from trainers and students. The emphasis will be to make each training session comprehensive, clear, focused, and relevant to the role of the field parole officer.

In addition, the committee will, through the agency training coordinator and in conjunction with the Massachusetts Criminal Justice Training Council, conduct a study to identify and

inventory the most efficient and most skilled training resources inside and outside the agency.

The goal of this committee is to put in place a process that will provide, and continually improve, support and develop a skilled and professional workforce for the agency through the following:

- The development and implementation of a four-week new officer basic training program that includes an overview of agency organization, mission and operations, current policy and practice, relevant legal issues, case management and supervision techniques, self defense, and firearms qualification.
- The expansion of a regular in-service training cycle for field staff. The next is scheduled for the Spring of 1988, when the agency will conduct a week long, in-service training session designed to refresh experienced parole officers on current policy and practice and to bring them up to date on latest developments in the areas of law, first aid, communicable disease cases, domestic violence, child abuse, self defense, and firearms. A subsequent cycle of in-service modules will be presented in scattered sessions beginning in mid-FY 1989. This cluster of topics will follow the prior in-service curriculum with the addition of counseling and interview technique modules.
- The development of a training curriculum to be available to all staff interested in improving their supervisory and management skills. The goal of this training is to help existing supervisory and management personnel improve their skills, to identify and assist qualified, trained and parole-experienced staff in moving into supervisory and management positions.

Differential Supervision. The third goal within this area is the development and implementation of an improved system of differential supervision which maximizes the effectiveness of agency resources through the use of new supervision strategies and technologies.

This goal will require that various aspects of field parole supervision policy and practice be modified in an incremental and coordinated fashion. As caseloads are reduced and more resources are available to spend on each case, that time must be structured so that the safety of the public and the reintegration of the offender are enhanced. The goal is not simply more contact between parole officer and parolee, but rather more time spent more effectively on the management of all aspects of a caseload.

This includes the capacity to routinely and correctly classify parolees into relevant supervision groups and to develop and carry out detailed supervision plans which bring to bear strategies of monitoring, supervision, support, and enforcement that best address the specific risks which the individual represents to the community and the needs of each client.

Work in the area of this initiative was begun in early 1987 with the establishment of an agency task force on field supervision issues. The goal of this ongoing effort has been to utilize knowledge and experience resident in agency staff to identify the weaker areas of field policy and practice and to begin to develop and strengthen them.

As a follow up, in December 1987, the Massachusetts Parole Board began the development of a risk assessment tool that would bridge both Parole Board release decision-making and field supervision case planning. Future efforts in the area of this initiative include:

- Completion of a tool that would assess and summarize the risk, stakes and needs of each inmate at the time of the release hearing. This tool would serve as one factor in informing both the Board's release decision and, upon release, the field parole officer's initial decisions concerning the development of a supervision plan including the level of contact indicated in the case. This development process is expected to continue into the spring of 1989. Technical assistance on the policy development and research aspects of this project

will, in part, be underwritten with a grant from the National Institute of Corrections. Funding for the technical assistance is anticipated to be available in the Spring of 1988.

- As Regions 9 and 10 come on line with reduced caseloads, supervision structures and techniques developed for and modified by the agency's Intensive Parole Supervision Program will be introduced into the regional office operation and applied to a portion of each parole officer's caseload.
- In addition, the use of technologies such as electronic monitoring, strategies such as daily reporting centers and the innovative and expanded use of proven techniques such as drug and alcohol testing will be evaluated for possible use statewide.
- Development of an enhanced reassessment process and instrument as a means of informing the regular review and modification of a parole plan will be undertaken. It is envisioned that this instrument will base the reassessment of an individual parolee's risk to the community on conformity with the parole supervision plan (compliance with parole conditions) and the achievement of behavioral goals enumerated in the plan. Adjustments to the supervision plan and contact levels will be based on the parolee's performance and behavior under supervision. Full implementation is expected in the Summer of 1989.

Performance Monitoring. With a growing staff and a growing caseload, monitoring how well the job is being done is a continuing and important role for agency management. Such monitoring needs to be done to assess the effectiveness of individual parole officers, regional field offices and the various special programs and projects run by the Field Services Unit. To these ends, actions will be taken in two areas to improve the capacity of the agency to monitor its operations.

As noted above, new positions, including the addition of a second and third deputy chief of Field Services in the central office and assistant regional office supervisors, will reduce the span of control now demanded of the Chief of Field Services and the regional office supervisors.

Additional support for the Chief of Field Services will afford the agency a greater degree of control over operations and an enhanced capacity to monitor performance as the agency moves to expand operations to 13 locations statewide.

Added regional office supervisory support staff will provide the regional office supervisors with the resources to more closely monitor office operations and to more directly guide and assist parole officers in the management of their caseloads. The goal is to establish and maintain tighter standards of operation of a regional office as well as to more closely monitor the effectiveness of parole officers in managing their individual caseloads.

The second area is the development and implementation of enhanced procedures for routine monitoring of regional office operations and the management of caseloads. The existing process needs to be upgraded in light of the greater capability that new supervisory and information management resources will afford the agency.

Operational standards embodied in the agency's policies and procedures manual are currently under revision. Scheduled for completion in June 1988, the updated manual will contain not only the standards against which agency performance will be measured, but also the methods and schedule to be employed in the reviewing process.

In addition, automated information systems will be developed with an eye toward supporting the monitoring of agency operations at the case, caseload, regional office, and agency level.

Resource Requirements

Present budget and proposed requests, if successful, will provide an adequate number of parole officers to reduce caseloads to 45 and to move toward differential supervision practices.

As research is done on parolee characteristics and parole officer actions which relate to success on parole, future estimates of staffing needs will be done. These may eventually require additional personnel, as well as particular skills.

Examining agency training practices and specifying updated parole officer responsibilities will require an estimated two person-years of effort over the next eighteen months. That will require internal staff time dedicated to this set of tasks, but no immediate additional staff.

External contract resources to assist in the analyses identified (parolee success study, training and parole officer responsibility reviews) are essential to achieving our strategic objectives in caseload management. These needs will be reflected in FY 1989 and FY 1990 budget requests.

Coordination and Integration Requirements

As work proceeds in improving caseload management in the field, parallel efforts will be undertaken in redefining the roles of institutional parole officers (IPO's). The same information which IPO's prepare to assess risk, stakes, parole conditions, and needs will be basic to developing individual parole supervision plans.

Similarly, the work to be done in the information support area is designed to help track cases and provide integrated information access and processing, which will aid the field services staff.

Finally, most services to parolees will continue to be provided from agencies other than the Parole Board. Therefore, continuing coordination and service development with various other agencies (e.g., in substance abuse, mental health, housing, employment and training, and public health) will be required as the needs of the parole population are better defined and quantified. At both the level of aggregate service demands for a budget year, and the level of individual access for a specific client-parolee, coordination and interagency planning will be necessary and will receive priority attention from the agency.

C. Information Support to Improve the Quality of Decisions, Supervision, and Management

Information support (for data processing, word processing, and communications) is critical to the Massachusetts Parole Board in both an operational and strategic sense. It supports each of the two previously described areas of decision-making structure and caseload management. The growth in the volume of cases intensifies the need for greater efficiency in case preparation for decisions and supervision; management also requires reliable information for planning, budgeting, resource allocation, research, and program evaluation.

Enhanced information support is essential to the Board's accountability and credibility. Operating with the limited and mostly manual information system currently available, the Board cannot respond quickly to inquiries, such as those concerning the status or location of a particular parolee. The Board must make release decisions based on limited information, and has no mechanism for evaluating the results of those decisions. There is no sure and systematic way to verify that supervision and services are carried out as called for in the supervision plan. Management lacks important tools for distributing caseloads and supporting budget requests. These limitations will seriously hamper the Parole Board's ability to carry out its mission as its caseload continues to grow, even as the agency incorporates its new positions.

The thrust of the information support strategy outlined below is to select, develop, and implement an independent, integrated information system. The Parole Board will continue to work closely with other criminal justice agencies and the courts in obtaining and providing information, but will maintain its own automated, client-based information system. Having a single system for institutional and field services will enhance the quality and consistency of information, reduce redundant efforts, and support a systematic and unified operation.

Objectives

We have three specific objectives with respect to information support:

- to install an information system to track parolees and prisoners eligible for parole, to track parole officer caseloads, and service demands; and to provide information

for management, research, and evaluation purposes;

- to integrate data collection and distribution for all parts of the agency so that central storage and retrieval of information from all agency locations are possible and so that the needs of agency personnel to communicate information can be met in a timely and accurate manner; and
- to ensure that the information system is capable of growing and adapting to future Parole Board information needs.

Specific Strategies

Define the Scope of System. The Parole Board is currently undertaking three initiatives in the information systems area. One is the installation of a case tracking system, known as PROBER, on microcomputers in eight existing field offices and in two program sites. The hardware installed to run PROBER will also enable field offices to use a word processing package. The second is the preparation of an automated case processing system for use throughout the agency. The third is the installation of terminals linked to the Criminal Justice Information Systems for access to LEAPS information for all regional parole offices.

Because much of the same information is used repeatedly by users in different parts of the system, a decision was made that a single integrated system would be developed, rather than separate systems for release decisionmaking, supervision, and management and research. This approach responds to the objectives regarding integration of data collection and distribution, and promoting communication within the agency and with other criminal justice agencies.

As the "last" agency in the criminal justice system, the Parole Board relies heavily on information provided by other agencies--police departments, the courts, corrections, probation. The information systems of these agencies are separate, although there is some sharing of information and access to files. At issue was the question of the extent to which parole should have its own data base, and at what point in the process it should initiate the client file. Because of the need to anticipate hearings, the benefit of obtaining information from the courts at the time of the trial, and the differences between the various state and county institu-

tions, a decision was made that parole should capture data at the time of incarceration and maintain its own data files.

Select the Systems Approach. The Parole Board has looked at several different types of information systems. A final choice requires a detailed specification of the alternative systems and comparative analysis. The Board plans to engage the services of a technical consultant to help evaluate alternative approaches, and aims to complete this task by January 1989. This will include:

- Identify information needs and information processing requirements.
- Define and identify constraints. Much of the work to define system requirements, such as the number of users and locations, is still underway. Further work will be done in the area of identifying documents and sources of information.
- Evaluate alternative systems approaches. After the Parole Board has defined its information needs, it will be necessary to conduct a technical evaluation of alternative approaches. Alternatives range from a decentralized system of stand-alone computers in the field to a highly centralized system in which all data entry, programming, and other functions are centralized. The agency is pursuing a network approach in which data files are kept centrally, but access and functions such as data entry, modification, and report generation could be performed in the field.

The evaluation of alternative approaches, as well as the subsequent evaluation of vendor proposals, will consider:

- initial investment (hardware costs, software development, space requirements including environmental conditions, communications lines and other utilities, training, data entry, start-up)

- operating requirements (staff, supplies, hardware and software maintenance, utilities, training of new staff); and
- performance factors (response time, timeliness of data, flexibility, ease of use, capacity, expandability, risk, reliability, accuracy of data)

Define System Specifications. The consultant will prepare a full technical description, with detailed system and performance specifications, to be included in the Request for Proposal at the start of the procurement process.

Procure System. The process of equipment procurement and software development is planned to begin during fiscal year 1989 and continue into fiscal year 1990. The major steps are:

- prepare budget request;
- prepare and issue Requests for Proposals;
- select hardware and software vendors; and
- procure equipment and software.

It is likely that two different RFP's, one for hardware and one for software, will be required and need to be issued sequentially. Preparation of the RFP, response by vendors, and evaluation of proposals, will take up to six months for each acquisition of hardware and software.

Implement the System. Preparation of a detailed implementation plan, with specific responsibilities, procedures, and schedules, is a critical task in developing information support. The new system must be adequately tested in the field and a schedule for phasing in operations prepared.

Introduction of a new information system will require central office staff to work closely with the field offices and institutions to work through implementation and operating procedures. It will be critical to work closely with other criminal justice agencies, as well as with Parole Board staff, in the implementation planning.

The initial implementation planning has begun. An integrated systems approach has been selected. Vendor selection, systems design, procurement, installation and testing will continue through 1990, with completion of the installation process targeted for fiscal years 1990 and 1991.

Resource Requirements

Selection and implementation of an automated information system will require a full-time information systems manager. This person will be familiar with information systems technologies and must also understand the agency's operation, "culture", and management needs. He or she will have primary responsibility for the preparation of RFP's, budget proposals, and the implementation plan.

As discussed, the Board plans to retain the services of a technical consultant to conduct the evaluation of alternative systems approaches, prepare systems specifications for the RFP's, and assist in evaluation of vendor proposals. An estimated budget to acquire various technical skills and experience with systems implementation and operation is likely to be \$50,000 to \$75,000. Other staffing needs will depend in large part on the approach and system selected.

It is anticipated, however, that the system will require a systems operator to be responsible for the operation and maintenance of all hardware and communications infrastructure. This person will be needed toward the end of fiscal year 1989 when the hardware vendor is selected, and would work closely with that vendor. Similarly, a systems programmer who would be responsible for software would also be needed toward the end of fiscal year 1989, to work closely with the vendor selected during software design. Other resource requirements--capital investment, training, operating costs--can only be estimated after a systems approach is selected.

Coordination and Integration Requirements

Perhaps the most critical aspect of coordinating this effort is to hire or designate an information systems manager, whose principal job responsibility will be the planning and implementation of information support systems. This person will need to work with personnel from all parts of the agency, to manage consultants who will help assess alternative systems, and to manage the procurement, installation, and training process. The manager must ensure that the data are translated into reports which are genuinely useful to management, supervisors, and parole officers, and that the system incorporates incentives for the timely and accurate entry and updating of data.

In addition, the system will require systems analysts to provide user support. Any staff member experiencing a problem with system hardware or software will be able to pick up the phone and talk to a knowledgeable person who can resolve the problem quickly. Special attention needs to be given to

proper training, incentives, and reinforcement. This is particularly challenging in an environment in which parole officers are accustomed to exercising a high degree of discretion, and where the norm is to tailor procedures rather than follow a single, clearly specified procedure.

The Parole Board information systems team will need to work closely with other criminal justice agencies to coordinate data and document needs. This will provide a good opportunity to review and define information flow. It will require both flexibility and an appreciation of the constraints under which each agency operates.

VII. LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

This strategic plan for the Massachusetts Parole Board sets out an ambitious agenda for the agency over the next five years. Whether or not the agency has the will to complete such an agenda will depend, in part, upon the competence of its implementation efforts. Each of the preceding sections has addressed the issue of implementation and interactions with other parts of the strategy. But the scope of such an effort requires that implementation planning take place from the perspective of the strategy and agency as a whole.

In order to assure the implementation of this strategic plan, the Massachusetts Parole Board has taken the following steps:

- Designation of a strategic plan manager;
- Adoption of action plans for each strategic area;
- Development of a schedule of periodic reviews of progress and problems in implementation;
- Anticipated adjustment of the strategic and action plans to reflect changing realities and priorities;
- Linkage of the strategic plan to the budget process.

The Board will designate an annual event, (possibly the quarterly meeting that is the anniversary of strategy issuance) as a working retreat for the executive team and working group to focus on adjustments that should be reflected in the published strategic plan. That retreat will focus on the next five-year horizon of the Board, while the other quarterly meetings would focus on operational planning in support of the strategy. The Board is also considering the possibility of chartering a formal advisory group with membership from outside the agency drawn from a broad spectrum of disciplines. The purpose of this group would be to assemble expertise from the public and private sectors for future strategic planning efforts.

A strategy document is worth little without the will to act. Immediate and specific actions have been outlined here to ensure implementation of this strategic plan and to ensure the continuation of strategic planning in the years ahead. They represent the will of this agency to shape its own future.

